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REPORT ON A SURVEY OF READERS OF
THE AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH MAGAZINE

Readers are overwhelmingly satisfied with the magazine AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH and wouldn't change it greatly if they had the option, a sample readership survey shows.

A representative sample of the readers was polled in the fall of 1955 and asked to evaluate the magazine on 14 points and to suggest ways of making the magazine more useful to them. Not only the statistical evaluation but also the burden of the comments was to the effect that the magazine is quite useful as now published.

Seventeen groups of readers were polled--8 of them in sufficient number for individual analysis. In all, 1,275 questionnaires were returned and analyzed, representing the opinions of nearly 40,000 persons who had direct access to the 27,700 copies of the magazine then circulated. Actually, several times that number of persons ultimately see the circulating copies. It is impossible to estimate closely how many persons actually read the magazine, for the respondents' estimates of the number of readers per copy exceeds, in the aggregate, the number in the organizations or groups to which AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH circulates. Some but not all of this large number of readers can be accounted for as students of vocational agriculture in rural high schools and as visitors in the offices of county agents and some other offices having extensive public contacts.

Four departments of the magazine are read regularly or at least frequently by three-fourths or more of the readers, the survey returns show. Editorial, Crops and Soils, Livestock, and Dairy are the better read departments. The other three departments, Poultry, Fruits and Vegetables, and Food and Home, are read by half to two-thirds of the persons seeing the magazine.

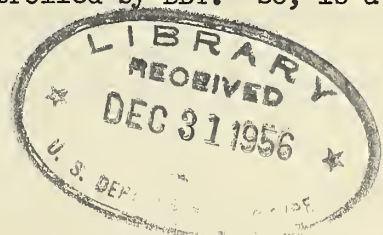
Half of the respondents stated they have used information from the magazine in their work. Many specific stories were listed from memory as having been useful. In some cases, the respondents merely pointed out subject fields as sources of useful information. All departments of the magazine are represented in the lists.

The magazine is used for student assignments and free-choice reading, incorporation in lecture notes, for discussions with farmers, fellow scientists and others, and as information to incorporate in public talks and in newspaper farm columns. Many readers were grateful that they could be informed on current research developments and be spared the embarrassment of being asked about them by farmers or others who first saw them reported in popular farm journals. Background information was perhaps the commonest use mentioned by our readers.

While stories for AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH are not written with the expectation that the information will be incorporated directly into research projects, a story reporting the development of an orange juice powder by the Western Utilization Research Laboratory proved an exception. An ARS entomologist read the story, obtained some of the new powder for experimentation, and found that he could substitute it for fresh fruit for growing Mexican fruit flies for experimental study. The story led to a better technique and a significant saving in that entomological research program.

An ARS plant pathologist wrote that the article reporting that the vector for peach mosaic was found to be a mite, rather than thrips, as suspected, started him thinking. He has a similar problem in Silver Top disease control in grasses. DDT, a control for thrips, controls the disease. "Yet a mite is the probable vector," he wrote, "and may not be controlled by DDT. So, is a thrip involved in movement of mite, etc.?"

(more)



The questionnaire directed attention at several aspects of the magazine to learn whether AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH is a fundamentally sound and well-balanced journal. In these particulars, again, readers seem to be quite satisfied with the magazine--in the amount of research detail (specifically, the limited amount of detail) we report, our reporting of preliminary findings from limited study, our handling of fundamental research findings, and the over-all journalistic character and balance of the magazine. Many comments were made, including a variety of suggestions for change. Unfortunately, most of the changes proposed would bias the magazine in favor of some vocational groups and conflict with the interests expressed by others. Some proposals are desirable but impractical--viz, the publication of the magazine in several regional editions.

Several facts stand out from this study.

First was the surprising vote of confidence in the magazine. Literally thousands of readers look upon AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH as a dependable source of information on what's going on in USDA research. They want and evidently think the magazine gives them the top selection of research findings while they're fresh. This dependence is a sobering thought--a presumption of a faultless journalistic vision that the staff can scarcely live up to. This confidence demands more, not less, reportorial perseverance.

Not only do readers want the cream skimmed from the research laboratories. They gave a distinct impression that they'd welcome a little more interpreting of these choice research findings--that they think we can do it properly. This poses many difficulties and, of course, calls for additional help from scientists who did the work. It means also that writers must make a judicious effort for interpretation as a regular part of reporting.

Another impression stands out clearly--that readers have less enthusiasm for 2-page and longer stories than for the shorter ones. This is an interest the staff can do something about month by month. But it calls for more work--not less. It means telling some of the longer stories in short space, and the medium-sized stories in even less space if we're to accomodate another wish for more illustrations. Briefer writing is an arduous undertaking. And it means finding and writing more stories. These are not small tasks for a limited magazine staff.

The demand for progress reports far exceeded all expectations. Even the researchers ask for them, contrary to expectation. Many think the magazine is covering this field well. Certainly a lot of them rely on us to do this.

There was a surprising similarity in the way different occupational groups marked the questionnaire. If there's a point where interest dips, it's with the State experiment station group.

The greatest single impression from the survey is that despite many proposals for change, AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH represents a compromise of the interests of all groups for the good of many, and that all groups derive significant values from reading the magazine. Many readers said this magazine alone enables them by limited reading to see the highlights of new agricultural discoveries.

Nevertheless, a real need underlies each proposal. The editors of the magazine intend to meet these needs to the extent practical, although in many cases the adjustment may have to take a different form than was suggested. It's a month-to-month challenge to make each issue of the magazine satisfying to our readers. Even the large body of favorable opinion makes the challenge more urgent--that we will not fail the people who have come to depend on us for useful information.

A copy of the questionnaire form is enclosed and the following tabulation shows in weighted percentages how our respondents as a whole answered the questionnaire. Opinions of the larger groups of readers were sampled in sufficient number for group analysis and their opinions are discussed separately in later portions of the report. Statistical summaries and comments of each such group are also presented.

(more)

4. In which of these AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH departments have you read articles during the past year?

	Regularly (8 or more issues)	Frequently (5-7)	Rarely (1-4)	Never	No Answer
Editorial	32%	31%	13%	2%	22%
Crops and Soils	39	34	7	1	19
Livestock	40	30	9	1	20
Dairy	29	24	15	2	30
Food and Home	14	19	25	4	38
Poultry	23	21	22	4	30
Fruits and Veg.	20	20	23	5	32
Agrisearch Notes	43	28	7	1	21

6. Except for articles which you may be interested as a specialist, do AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH articles give you enough information on the particular developments reported?

Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never	No Answer
7%	72½%	9%	½%	11%

7. What do you think of AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH'S practice of reporting on research projects before their completion?

Like very much	Like somewhat	Dislike somewhat	Dislike very much	No opinion	No Answer
64%	20%	4%	2%	6%	4%

8. Does the magazine make clear to you whether an article reports preliminary findings or a completed study?

Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never	No Answer
23%	59%	6%	--	12%

9. How well, in your opinion, does AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH bring out the significance of research discoveries?

Exceptionally well	Very well	Fairly well	Poorly	No Answer
19%	57%	11%	1%	12%

10. How interested are you in research findings that have no immediate prospect of practical application?

Highly Interested	Reasonably Interested	Slightly Interested	Not Interested	No Answer
21%	48%	19%	3%	9%

13. Would you change AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH with respect to any of the following items?

	Would include more	Would include fewer	Would leave as is	No opinion	No Answer
Technical details in articles	17%	5%	41%	8%	29%
Charts and picture-graphs	26	2	35	7	30
Photographs	27	2	35	6	30
Long Articles	10	19	32	7	32
One-page articles	24	3	35	7	31
Shorter articles	21	4	32	10	33
Total pages in the magazine	20½	½	35	11	33

READER PREFERENCE BY PRINCIPAL VOCATIONAL GROUPS

4. IN WHICH OF THESE AGRICULTURAL
RESEARCH DEPARTMENTS HAVE YOU READ
 ARTICLES DURING THE PAST YEAR?

	Weighted Average--All Readers	Vo-Ag Education	County Agents	State Extension	State Experiment Stations	ARS Research	ARS Regulatory	SCS and S. C. Districts	Farmers Home Administration	Research Advisory Committee
Editorial										
regularly	32	27	38	35	21	36	42	41	41	48
frequently	31	28	36	35	30	34	31	39	32	33
rarely	13	14	15	11	15	16	7	12	13	4
never	2	1	--	--	5	2	--	--	--	--
no answer	22	30	11	19	29	12	20	8	14	15
Crops and Soils										
regularly	39	41	54	25	18	43	23	61	43	45
frequently	34	38	39	40	22	29	30	32	42	29
rarely	7	2	4	10	17	11	13	1	5	11
never	1	--	--	--	5	2	--	--	--	3
no answer	19	19	3	25	38	15	34	6	10	12
Livestock										
regularly	40	49	51	25	16	31	63	18	50	41
frequently	30	29	39	29	28	29	12	32	38	20
rarely	9	3	7	13	10	23	10	25	4	16
never	1	--	1	1	5	3	1	2	--	2
no answer	20	19	2	32	41	14	14	23	8	21
Dairy										
regularly	29	41	40	20	12	26	43	8	47	27
frequently	24	25	34	22	19	21	14	25	35	20
rarely	15	8	12	18	18	29	10	20	8	15
never	2	--	1	2	5	4	2	5	--	5
no answer	30	26	13	38	46	20	31	34	10	33
Food and Home										
regularly	14	13	14	17	8	18	22	7	17	26
frequently	19	20	13	24	17	26	21	16	30	22
rarely	25	25	31	22	21	27	17	35	27	15
never	4	4	4	5	5	5	2	9	1	4
no answer	38	38	38	32	49	24	38	33	25	33
Poultry										
regularly	23	30	30	13	18	21	35	5	25	25
frequently	21	28	35	21	14	26	21	8	26	15
rarely	22	18	17	21	20	28	16	34	29	17
never	4	--	--	8	7	5	1	14	1	9
no answer	30	24	18	37	41	20	27	39	19	34
Fruits & Vegetables										
regularly	20	19	26	26	20	28	24	8	15	36
frequently	20	17	31	29	11	28	26	26	25	20
rarely	23	29	23	14	18	23	14	23	28	18
never	5	3	2	5	9	3	--	6	7	3
no answer	32	32	18	26	42	18	36	37	25	23
Agriseach Notes										
regularly	43	40	50	51	37	51	49	49	33	54
frequently	28	26	30	27	26	26	24	37	37	25
rarely	7	5	8	3	9	8	6	4	8	5
never	1	1	1	1	4	1	--	--	1	1
no answer	21	28	11	18	24	14	21	10	21	15

	Weighted Average--All Readers	Vo-Ag Education	County Agents	State Extension	State Experiment Stations	ARS Research	ARS Regulatory	SCS and SC Districts	Farmer Home Administration	Research Advisory Committee
6. EXCEPT FOR ARTICLES IN WHICH YOU MAY BE INTERESTED AS A SPECIALIST, DO AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH ARTICLES GIVE YOU ENOUGH INFORMATION ON THE PARTICULAR DEVELOPMENTS REPORTED?										
always	7	5	5	5	8	6	9	3	10	6
usually	72 $\frac{1}{2}$	66	77	75	61	82	74	90	79	81
sometimes	9	10	13	13	10	10	11	4	9	9
never	1 $\frac{1}{2}$	--	--	--	2	--	--	--	--	--
no answer	11	19	5	7	19	2	6	3	2	4
7. WHAT DO YOU THINK OF AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH'S PRACTICE OF REPORTING RESEARCH PROJECTS BEFORE THEIR COMPLETION?										
like very much	64	73	68	67	49	54	56	81	53	76
like somewhat	20	20	22	20	19	26	22	15	36	17
dislike somewhat	4	3	2	5	8	9	3	3	4	2
dislike very much	2	1	1	2	4	4	--	1	1	--
no opinion	6	3	4	4	5	4	19	--	4	3
no answer	4	--	3	2	15	3	--	--	2	2
8. DOES THE MAGAZINE MAKE CLEAR TO YOU WHETHER AN ARTICLE REPORTS PRELIMINARY FINDINGS OR A COMPLETED STUDY?										
always	23	23	21	25	14	10	27	33	24	33
usually	59	55	71	63	54	68	62	60	70	60
sometimes	6	2	6	6	10	18	6	4	3	3
never	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
no answer	12	20	2	6	22	4	5	3	3	4
9. HOW WELL, IN YOUR OPINION, DOES AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH BRING OUT THE SIGNIFICANCE OF RESEARCH DISCOVERIES?										
exceptionally well	19	24	21	9	13	18	26	18	17	20
very well	57	52	57	67	45	58	55	72	73	65
fairly well	11	4	19	16	16	20	14	9	7	13
poorly	1	--	1	--	1	2	--	--	2	--
no answer	12	20	2	8	25	2	5	1	1	2
10. HOW INTERESTED ARE YOU IN RESEARCH FINDINGS THAT HAVE NO IMMEDIATE PROSPECT OF PRACTICAL APPLICATION?										
highly interested	21	11	12	22	45	45	10	12	10	41
reasonably interested	48	49	49	51	31	48	58	52	47	40
slightly interested	19	21	31	23	8	5	25	26	33	13
not interested	3	2	8	2	--	1	4	9	9	3
no answer	9	17	--	2	16	1	3	12	1	3

13. WOULD YOU CHANGE AGRICULTURAL
RESEARCH WITH RESPECT TO ANY
OF THE FOLLOWING ITEMS?

	Weighted Average--All Readers									
	Vo-Ag Education	County Agents	State Extension	State Experiment Stations	ARS Research	ARS Regulatory	SCS and SC Districts	Farmers Home Administration	Research Advisory Committee	
Technical details in articles: would include more	17	12	14	15	28	31	8	17	9	12
would include fewer	5	6	10	4	--	2	3	4	10	4
would leave as is	41	38	48	43	27	49	44	60	47	49
no opinion	8	9	6	4	10	4	13	5	9	4
no answer	29	35	22	34	35	14	32	14	25	31
Charts and picture-graphs: would include more	26	34	28	17	18	30	14	38	23	21
would include fewer	2	--	2	4	2	4	5	1	5	1
would leave as is	35	32	30	37	30	46	38	43	43	41
no opinion	7	2	14	6	11	5	12	4	9	5
no answer	30	32	26	36	39	15	31	14	20	32
Photographs: would include more	27	32	40	27	14	23	21	36	25	18
would include fewer	2	--	4	2	3	5	1	2	1	4
would leave as is	35	27	27	31	35	52	38	47	44	39
no opinion	6	4	6	4	9	2	9	4	7	4
no answer	30	37	23	36	39	18	31	11	23	35
Long articles (2 to 3 pages): would include more	10	13	4	5	19	10	4	5	10	7
would include fewer	19	11	31	34	11	16	17	32	26	24
would leave as is	32	35	28	15	21	52	29	40	33	30
no opinion	7	6	8	7	9	4	11	6	8	4
no answer	32	35	29	39	40	18	39	17	23	35
One-page articles: would include more	24	16	43	33	10	23	32	31	31	20
would include fewer	3	3	1	3	7	2	1	1	4	--
would leave as is	35	41	28	24	28	49	30	44	37	36
no opinion	7	5	4	4	11	5	10	6	7	7
no answer	31	35	24	36	44	21	27	18	21	37
Shorter articles (under 1 page): would include more	21	12	27	33	9	20	18	39	24	28
would include fewer	4	3	4	1	6	8	1	3	5	2
would leave as is	32	36	29	34	25	43	32	35	40	24
no opinion	10	10	6	7	15	9	10	8	8	9
no answer	33	39	34	25	45	20	39	15	23	37
Total pages in magazine: would include more	20 $\frac{1}{2}$	26	18	14	15	26	17	22	19	19
would include fewer	$\frac{1}{2}$	--	1	--	--	1	1	2	--	--
would leave as is	35	31	46	38	23	44	33	49	44	38
no opinion	11	8	8	11	15	12	14	11	11	6
no answer	33	35	27	37	47	17	35	16	26	37

READERS OF AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH MAGAZINE SURVEYED

	Magazines Sent	Questionnaires Sent	Questionnaires Returned
<u>TEACHING</u>			
Vocational Agriculture Teachers --	10,000	200	117
<u>EXTENSION WORK</u>			
County Agents -----	3,353	300	132
State Extension Specialists -----	2,553	200	114
<u>RESEARCH</u>			
ARS Researchers -----	1,257	266	136
State Experiment Station Researchers -----	1,200	200	106
Private Researchers -----	500	100	46
<u>REGULATORY WORK</u>			
ARS Regulatory Workers -----	1,124	134	99
<u>PRESS, RADIO, AND TELEVISION</u>			
Farm and Trade Press -----	800	109	52
Radio Farm Directors -----	600	91	40
<u>SOIL CONSERVATION</u>			
Soil Conservation Service -----	520	200	98
<u>STABILIZATION PROGRAMS</u>			
ABC Chairmen -----	3,300	200	67
<u>CREDIT PROGRAMS</u>			
Farmers Home Administration -----	1,780	200	102
<u>OTHER</u>			
Agricultural Marketing Service ---	90	30	13
State Departments of Agriculture -	54	54	11
Experiment Station Editors -----	62	62	33
Agricultural Attaches -----	24	24	2
Research Advisory Committees ---	<u>317</u>	<u>317</u>	<u>107</u>
TOTAL	27,534	2,687	1,275

